

Communications within TW to support the Refugee Family

Our aim is to give the Family the practical and moral support they need to gain confidence and independence as soon as possible. Immediately after their arrival there will be intensive demands on TW volunteers. Over time, individual relationships will develop and looser arrangements may be adopted. In the short term there will be a plethora of appointments and meetings requiring our contribution or presence. Accordingly, an electronic calendar will be created and shared with the Family so that a weekly overview is available, indicating which volunteers will be involved with specific engagements. If necessary, this might be assisted by a prompting system alerting individual volunteers on the previous evening to their forthcoming roles.

As the timetabled meetings take place (or are postponed), the relevant volunteer should record what transpired so that these also become a series of factual progress reports. The Family should be consulted about such an arrangement and, if agreeable, they should have access to the ongoing progress reports.

To respond to the many enquiries expected from the Family in the early weeks, a small and focussed WhatsApp group (WAG) will be set up. It will be limited to the two main volunteer contacts with the Family, plus two more in reserve when the former are not available. If an issue is raised involving a specialist “lead”, the main contact on duty at that time should consult that “lead” and arrange with the Family what further action should be taken. This will spare the Family having to understand our structure and personnel arrangements themselves. It will be for the four main contacts to decide on a weekly rota without reference to the wider Co-ordinating Committee.

As the Family begin to find their feet, direct contact with most of the individual “leads” will be established. The need for the WAG might then be reviewed on a monthly basis until it is wound up. In any event at no point should any individual volunteer become a designated a Facebook “Friend” (or similar confidant(e) on other sharing apps) of any member of the Family. They may only do so after ceasing to be a TW volunteer.

The WAG should focus on immediate issues in a trouble-shooting mode. It will have access to a translation facility and the ability for the Family to send photos of letters, bills and other documents. It is therefore important that the Family acquires an effective smartphone on a contract which includes adequate data access for occasions when Wi-Fi is not available. It will be for the Family to choose its broadband provider.

For a wider discussion of broader issues which might arise in between meetings of the Co-ordinating Committee, e-mail should continue to be used, as at present. This would not include the Family.

However, in the medium term there may be a case for a general, TW-only WAG to communicate urgently any last-minute changes of plan, a clash of volunteer commitments, or sickness. Some people may not check their e-mails regularly whereas a WhatsApp message will automatically come up on their mobile phone. The case for this will be reviewed in the light of the operation of the other communications arrangements.